

By T. J. Auclair

I'm certainly no expert in course design, however, given my years of experience as a golf journalist covering hundreds of PGA Tour events, 50+ major championships and seven Ryder Cups, I would like to think I know a great course when I see one.

Born and raised in little Rhode Island, I realize my state is small in size. However, what the Ocean State lacks in square mileage, it more than makes up for in the form of world-class golf courses -- places like Newport Country Club, which most notably hosted the first U.S. Amateur and U.S. Open in 1895; Wannamoisett Country Club, a masterful Donald Ross creation, where the prestigious Northeast Amateur is annually contested; Rhode Island Country Club -- another Ross masterpiece -- which has produced PGA Tour players Brad Faxon, Billy Andrade and Brett Quigley and is the home of the PGA Tour-sanctioned CVS Charity Classic; the list goes on.

The fact is there's no shortage of great courses to play in my tiny state. It's also a fact that when I'm home, there's no place I'd rather play than Newport National, located in Portsmouth, R.I.

While the aforementioned private clubs are outstanding, Newport National is every bit as good and -- even better -- it's open to the public.

So, you ask, what makes Newport National so special? For me, its links style means there's a little piece of Scotland right around the corner; which is to say, aside from the incredibly private Newport Country Club, there's absolutely nothing like it around.

Designer J. Drew Rogers should walk with his chest puffed out and head held high because of the fine job he did creating the work of art that is Newport National -- a place that I would truly enjoy playing every day for the rest of my life. OK, if it's really cold in the winter up here, I might take a day off -- but you get the point!

If you judge classic golf course standards by age, Newport National is in its infancy. However, if you didn't know better, Drew's architectural style will have you believing Newport National has been where it lays for a hundred years. It's unpretentious, nothing is forced. Everything about Newport National looks and feels natural; but there's also a fun quirkiness to it, with the par-5 eighth green (almost a perfect rectangle) and the par-4 10th green (don't miss it short right because of the huge swale in the green) standing out.

Newport National fits upon the landscape like a breathtaking painting to canvas. There's not a boring hole out there. At most places, you look forward to playing that signature hole -- No. 17 at Sawgrass with the island green comes to mind. I've played Newport National several times and I couldn't tell you which hole was the signature hole if my life depended on it. They're all unique and special.

Newport National is as close to perfect as you'll find in a links course and it doesn't get any better for a place that welcomes the public. Aside from the swaying fescue that lines the fairways on either side, the course's strongest defense is the wind. And, let me tell you, when it's really howling, it can be a 3-4-club wind.

There's no denying that Newport National is a stern test. But, it's a fair and thoroughly enjoyable one, too.

I've had my share of decent and lousy scores at Newport National. However, one thing I've never had at Newport National is a bad day. That's impossible when you get lost in the beauty that Drew imagined and, most impressively, created. It's absolutely stunning.

J. Drew Rogers may not be a household name in the golf design business, even though he worked behind one for 20 years in Arthur Hills.

All I know is this: Whenever I see the names A.W. Tillinghast or Donald Ross in the field beside, "course designer," on a scorecard, I instantly know that's a course I have to play and, no matter the score, the day is going to be an absolute delight.

Now, based on my experiences at Newport National, whenever I see a course with the name J. Drew Rogers attached to it... give me the first available tee time, please!